



Book Review

Back Door Java: Negara, Rumah Tangga, dan Kampung di Keluarga Jawa. by Jan Newberry. Jakarta: KPG, 2013

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A state is often described as something complex that includes the executive, legislative, judicative, its people who belong to various religions and ethnicities with diverse social-economic problems, and its relation with other states such as sharing socio-economic borders, and other affairs. In this book Jan Newberry attempts to investigate a state through the eyes of mothers who get involved in the Indonesian Family Welfare Movement, known in Indonesia as Pembina Kesejahteraan Indonesia (PKK), in a village in Yogyakarta called Rumah Putri.

Newberry initially came to Indonesia to research the relationship between farmers and the state. However, during the 1992-1993 fieldwork, she admitted to be 'forced' by the situation to change the topic to be about the working class in cities, which was examining the working class mothers who are involved in the groups of the movement.

Newberry's interest peaked when finding out that a back door of a house in a Javanese society did not only mean a physical door, but also access to a wider cultural system. Therefore, the 'back door' has become the main key word for her research which she wrote in her *Back Door Java: State Formation and the Domestic in Working Class Java* (the Indonesian edition is translated by Bernadetta Esti Sumarah and Masri Haris with the title *Back Door Java: Negara, Rumah Tangga, dan Kampung di Keluarga Jawa* (Jakarta: KPG, 2013). It consists of six chapters plus an epilog and a post script.

In her study, Newberry differentiates the meanings of 'house', 'household', and 'home'. House is the physical form or building, which is resided and connected to the spatial conception and neighborhood. As has been stated, one of the main elements of a house is a door. For a Javanese society, a front door is always open as a symbol of the openness of the host to the guests to come to the house any time. The back door, on the other hand, is the traffic of goods and service and the more private individuals. Therefore, a house without a back door, as the house lived by Newberry, raises problems for the cultural system of a Javanese society. Until recently,

back doors are still the main part of Javanese houses even though, in line with the raise of the prosperity level, the Javanese architecture begins to be abandoned.

Household, furthermore, is understood as the activity of non-formal economics, such as *slametan*, et cetera. Besides, it is also related to the activity of state in which the mothers become the actors in the programs of the PKK, like that of food, housing, health, and so on.

Home as a place to live in comes up from the idea that the place for women is a home. Such an idea is similar to the three places of women in a Sundanese society: *kasur*/bed (sexuality and reproduction), *dapur*/kitchen (food), and *sumur*/well (personal hygiene). A home in a Javanese society has placed women as a caretaker and educator of children. Moreover, a woman is involved in the life of neighborhood and state through, one of the many, the national project of the PKK.

Family is commonly perceived as the unity of husband and wife, and children if any; and they live in the same home together, but Newberry comprehends it further. She places family as a non-formal state institution where the mothers are much involved in it. It is not surprising if the state has interests very much in women, as it is obvious in the existence of the Ministry of Woman Empowerment and the national program of the PKK. In a National Working Meeting of the P2W-KSS in 1981 it was mentioned that women were the motor and lance of the development.

Even though the mothers involved in the PKK, or in Javanese community, or even Indonesian society in general do not know how the PKK came about, Newberry believes that they are conscious with its existence. Even though the program of the PKK is only attended by tens of mothers and the program is often in the form of gathering (*arisan*), the PKK cannot be seen only as the group of the mothers. Newberry is sure that it has the same importance as the topics discussed by the researchers about the state in the Indonesian televisions. As is apparent in its program, the state has planted the ideology of Pancasila in the body of the PKK. The whole programs of the PKK are (1) the understanding and application of Pancasila, (2) mutual aid (*gotong-royong*), (3) food, (4) clothing, (5) housing and governance, (6) education and skills, (7) health, (8) the development of cooperation, (9) environmental sustainability, and (10) the planning of health.

In the post-script Newberry compares two conditions, namely the activity of the PKK in Rumah Putri, Yogyakarta and that of a non-government organization (NGO) in Boyolali. Both represent two different orders. In the PKK of Rumah Putri the mothers are positioned as the tip of

a lance of development, a term which ideologically connected closely to Soeharto/ New Order, and are encouraged to be involved in the PKK and perform the programs. On the other hand, the NGO is present to voice the ideas of reform such as democracy and civil society. In Rumah Putri they sit on the floor, while in the NGO's workshops the mothers and other female participants are bolstered to express their ideas.

Ultimately, I have to agree with Henk Schulte Nordholt who gives a testimony to the book. He states that this ethnographic work of Newberry about family, society, and the state in the daily life is a detailed and best work" (vi).

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